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REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES ON ITS FORTY-NINTH SESSION

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[18 March 1998]

GE.98-11409 (E)

Social, economic and political situation of the indigenous peoples of Latin America

1. Notwithstanding the existence, in theory, of the United Nations-proclaimed International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the situation of the indigenous peoples of Latin America as small farmers has been profoundly affected by the neo-liberal model:

(a) The legalized subjection of land to mercenary interests compels them to leave their farms and they never have the right, as indigenous peoples, to control their own territory;

(b) Import liberalization deprives them of reliable markets and fair prices for their products;

(c) The holders of concessions for the exploitation of the timber, oil and minerals on their land are the new masters of the age and not only plunder their natural resources but also pollute their environment;

(d) They are disproportionately affected by the geopolitical interests hidden behind the sham war on drugs waged by the United States of America;

(e) The budgets of the Latin American States are oriented towards strengthening of the forces of repression (army, police and other officials), and in parallel with this national health and education budgets are shrinking;

(f) There is no effort in national budgets to restore a balance between town and country;

(g) Governments are more concerned with serving national oligarchies and North American imperialism than with serving the people;

(h) Many States have yet to ratify ILO Convention No. 169, and those that have ratified it do not apply it;

(i) National security is used as a pretext to militarize the lands where indigenous peoples live;

(j) Governments' economic, social and political projects have as their objective the acculturation of indigenous peoples;

(k) Government policies discriminate against women, disregarding the value of their professional and intellectual abilities and work;

(l) There are no national laws to guard against the genetic theft that leads to the patenting of indigenous peoples' products and knowledge.

2. These points show that the International Decade proclaimed by the United Nations is likely in practice to be no more than empty words to assuage the conscience of the international organizations and to deceive indigenous peoples and peoples in general.

3. The most regrettable thing of all is that, where indigenous peoples are well organized and put up steadfast resistance in defence of their rights, they are harassed by the military or massacred, as in Mexico's Chiapas, Bolivia's Chaparé and Amayapampa, the Amazonian regions of Ecuador and Colombia, etc.

4. Governments, on the pretext of applying the law and defending the interests of national and international private firms, endow themselves with the right to massacre local populations. For indigenous peoples, the pursuit by Governments that subscribe to the neo-liberal model of free trade and the liberalization of agricultural imports means impoverishment and distress.

5. For these and other reasons, we appeal to the conscience of national and international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to ensure reparation of the injustice suffered by these peoples and support for their rights and legitimate demands.